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### China and the Politics of Cross–Cultural Representation in Interwar European Fiction

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**Volume 19 Issue 3 (September 2017) Article 5**

**Carles Prado-Fonts,**

**"China and the Politics of Cross-Cultural Representation in Interwar European Fiction "**

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**Abstract:** In his article "China and the Politics of Cross-Cultural Representation in Interwar European Fiction" Carles Prado-Fonts analyzes Joan Crespi's *La ciutat de la por* (The City of Fear, 1930) to illustrate the varied representations of China in interwar Europe. In the 1920s and 1930s, a plurality of views on China and the Chinese people became widespread across different parts of Europe, mainly shaped by English, French, and German representations. Contradictory images of China coexisted in literature, thought, and popular culture. Crespi's work exemplifies these contradictions: China appears as both an attainable reality and an unreachable fantasy, two tropes that prevailed in Catalan society after having been adapted from the European imagery. The novel responds to these contradictory discourses by launching a radical critique of Western modernity imposed on China. This article argues that representing China from Catalonia (or from the rest of Spain) not only implied the import of data and knowledge from European sources but also the transculturation of formal aspects and a subordination of agency. By showing how difficult it was to imagine China from the periphery of Europe without the mediation of these European centers, this article rethinks the politics of cross-cultural circulation in a noncolonizer, noncolonized context.

## Carles PRADO-FONTS

### China and the Politics of Cross-Cultural Representation in Interwar European Fiction

*La ciutat de la por* (The City of Fear) is a novel published in 1930 in Barcelona by Joan Crespi, a young and unknown author. It narrates how Albert Garriga decides to abandon his position as a young director of a textile factory in Catalonia and travel to the China he has read about since his childhood. There he will discover Canton through the guidance of Mr. Lawrence, a mysterious Englishman who seems to know everything about the place. Thanks to Lawrence's mediation Albert will progressively discover how the West has caused the loss of the traditional, exotic China that he had fantasized about. Why would such a realization have to be articulated through the voice of an Englishman?

This is only a minor example of a general trend with major significance: it was almost impossible to imagine China from the viewpoint of Catalonia (or from the rest of Spain for that matter) without the mediation of English, French, or German contexts. China was actually a popular topic at the time, far from the commonly-held perception that sees it as an unknown, mysterious place. In fact, China has never been a complete stranger to Spain (and Europe) over the last two centuries. Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, there has been an exhaustive amount of information in Europe about Chinese society and culture even if this information was not always translated in a direct way. China reached European national contexts through detours across pivotal centers such as England, France, and Germany, and a vast plurality of images became localized through processes of translation and transculturation of essays, novels, and popular culture. Even authors from peripheral nations in Europe who had never visited China were able to write thorough essays on Chinese society or set their novels in that context with reasonable veracity. This was the case with *La ciutat de la por*, which was published in the Catalan language in January 1930 and awarded a prestigious literary prize. Its young and unknown author, Joan Crespi, died two days after receiving the prize without having seen his novel published. While Crespi wrote *La ciutat de la por* without presumably having ever set a foot in China, the discourses on China and the images of the Chinese that circulated in Catalonia and Spain, mainly from European sources, allowed him to write an informed work full of colorful, authentic details.

The wealth of images in Crespi's novel creates multiple, often contradictory, representations of China and the Chinese. In this article, I gather these contradictions into two groups. On the one hand, *La ciutat de la por* depicts China as an attainable reality of the present, full of details which are described with almost photographic accuracy, and easily accessible for any Westerner. On the other hand it also represents China as an unattainable fantasy of the past, a land of mystery, action, and terror which is described according to the most classical conventions of the adventure novel, and that will never be regained. The significance of Crespi's work lies not only in the coexistence of both tropes but also—and especially—in the fact that the novel itself provides a way out of this paradox. *La ciutat de la por* historicizes this contradiction and blames the imposition of Western modernity and progress upon China as the reason why the East has lost its quintessential spirit.

Through this analysis I argue that representing China from a place like Catalonia not only implied the import of data and knowledge from European texts but also the transculturation of formal aspects and a subordination of agency. By showing how difficult it was to imagine China from the periphery of Europe without the mediation of these European centers, this article wants to rethink the politics of representation in a noncolonizer, noncolonized context and propose a more inclusive understanding of cross-cultural circulation. By so doing, it also wants to contribute to current scholarship on the representations of China in Spain and their relation with Spain's ambiguous political position in Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ai, *Nostalgia*; Davis, "Translation"; Martínez-Robles, "Constructing"; Torres-Pou, *Asia*).

This kind of oblique nature of cross-cultural representations has not been examined in literary and cultural theories dealing with East-West interactions. In her seminal study on the politics of translation between China and the West, Lydia Liu examined "the process by which new words, discourses, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy" within a non-European language due to the contact or collision with European languages (*Translingual Practice* 26). She went beyond the reifying patterns of resistance and domination, and conceptualized a more complex model than the eastward influence. Liu's contribution was fundamental to addressing that complexity of the East-West cross-cultural circulation, but did not consider the heterogeneity of the Western nations in contact with China and reified the conception of the West itself. Since then, attempts have been made to open up the terrain of East-West cross-cultural understanding by coining new terminology such as *sinographies* (Hayot, Saussy, and Yao, *Sinographies*) and there have also been interesting attempts at more integrative approaches of the Chinese contribution to the development of Western identity as well as its

literary and philosophical modernity (Bickers, *Britain in China*; Hayot, *Hypothetical Mandarin*; Kitson, *Romantic China*; Chang, *Fateful Ties*; Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination*). Yet, while this new scholarship has opened up new and important avenues of inquiry, it has not yet addressed the need to disaggregate a unified notion of "the West."

Actually, the need to pluralize the conception of the West and think beyond the center-periphery model of cross-cultural interactions has already been raised (Sakai, "Dislocation"; Hevia, *English Lessons*; Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*). This article attempts to contribute to these claims by offering an interpretation of these issues from a Catalan-Spanish perspective on China, which has not yet been formulated. It builds on the concept of translingual practice as proposed by Liu as well as on the concept of transculturation coined by Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s and developed by Ángel Rama in the 1980s, which acquired international currency thanks to Mary Louise Pratt's contribution. (For a recent development of the concept see also Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation*.) Both concepts share an emphasis on negotiation, tension, and reworking in the circulation across cultures, which is more appropriate than the ideas of acculturation or unidirectionality. They also situate (cultural) translation within a major, broader context of global circulation, which is appropriate for examining the indirect dissemination across different national contexts and beyond binary settings.

Pratt famously stated that "transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone," which is a "space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (*Imperial Eyes* 7-8). The recognition of the interactions between colonizer and colonized "within radically asymmetrical relations of power" has proved to be fruitful (8). But we also need to address such asymmetries outside that duality: what happens when a third agent—noncolonizer and noncolonized—enters the picture? How can we think through this problem? My answer is to examine a case study of cross-cultural representation of China that does not stem from a colonial context. In this article I hope to show the complex trajectory of imagining China in languages and frameworks other than—but dependent on—English, French, and German. *La ciutat de la por* opens up a new set of questions that need to be addressed if we want to have a better understanding of East-West representations. This should allow us to rethink issues of space, circulation, power, and agency in cross-cultural representation in a more complex way. The material production of globality is, after all, made out of these indirect complexities rather than clear-cut polarities.

On December 26, 1929, the Catalan literary community was shocked upon receiving the news that Joan Crespi had died only two days after winning the second prize in the prestigious award Les Ales Estes for his novel *La ciutat de la por*. Except for this sad mention, we don't have much information about Crespi. References from the time mainly tell us that he was a poor young man who died when he had a promising career ahead of him. Chronicles emphasize that the novel was well received by reviewers, who stressed the unusual combination of literary ambition and popular appeal and qualified it a "sensational work" or a "grandiose success" (*La Publicitat* January 24, 1930; *Mirador* January 30, 1930). *La ciutat de la por* is therefore a peculiar novel from an unknown author who wrote outside the established, canonical circles. It is an appropriate example to examine the way China was represented across the whole social spectrum: from the shared expectations of popular culture to the main concerns of intellectual discourses.

The novel opens with a powerful image: a European figure stands on a "shabby and filthy" Chinese raft (Crespi, *Ciutat* 9). We are told that he is arriving in Canton "overwhelmed by a violent excitement" (11). The man in ecstasy is Albert Garriga, the son of a Catalan textile industrialist who travels to China to experience at first hand the thrills from his childhood readings. As a child he had been a free spirit, very fond of books and novels. He used to remain in his bedroom "fantasizing, seduced by the passionate reading of the enigmas of Chinese mansions or the horrors and tortures that a barbarian mandarin inflicted upon his subjects" (16). Quixotic, voluptuous orientalism remained his passion and, after he became a lawyer, he traveled to Paris where he was finally able to realize one of his ambitions: to learn some Chinese. Albert's father died and our young man inherited the family fortune that came along with "a commitment and responsibility too heavy for his free spirit" (17). Now a man in an adult world, he is forced to lead the life of an adult. In despair, he decides to leave for Canton, the most "authentic" city in China, to recover "the sweetest souvenir from his childhood" (17).

Albert's expectations increase during the journey. His thoughts become more intense, "filled with the most extreme orientalism" (19). We are convinced of his engagement when he repudiates the luxurious steamer as too comfortable and too Western and decides to embark on a miserable raft that is about to break up (20). Just when his imagination is about to encounter reality, Albert pictures himself as a hero: "At last the fascinating and enigmatic Orient will be revealed to him; at last he would

become the hero of a mysterious adventure; the action of a Chinese drama would gravitate around him, tragic and obscure, full of terrors and filled with dangers" (19). Albert's first days in Canton are also filled with emotions. He is finally in China and we share his excitement through long depictions of the city. But he soon starts losing interest: he realizes the real China does not have the charm of the China he read about when he was a child. He then meets Mr. Lawrence, a mysterious Englishman who knows everything about the place. Through Lawrence, Albert finds a reason for his disenchantment: it is the impact of Western modernity that has caused the loss of the traditional China with its oriental mysticism and exotic charm (31). Albert's discontent is such that he even becomes sympathetic towards Chinese nationalism: "All these useless weeds must be removed from this land. We don't have any need to come and pollute the Orient with our things" (31).

Right in the middle of this existential cul-de-sac, Albert gets caught up in a frenetic adventure. He witnesses the kidnapping of a young Chinese woman—the daughter of a good friend of Lawrence's. Albert tries to find out her whereabouts and gets progressively involved in a series of fights and pursuits. All this action reconciles him with the quintessential China of his childhood readings: the girl seems to have been kidnapped by a triad with a cruel leader; he meets with an informant inside an opium den; he experiences torture while imprisoned in a rat-infested jail, and finally he escapes through dark, secret corridors. Albert is now "vibrant and optimistic" (98), full of energy again. All his rancor has vanished. But when he has finally escaped from his evil rivals as a marvelous superhero, he discovers that everything has been a scheme devised by Lawrence. Wishing to combat Albert's disillusionment, the Englishman had decided to take him back to the original and exotic Canton of the past (and the books), which is the Canton where Lawrence had met his lover, who had died the previous year. For Lawrence, to recuperate the old Canton for Albert is also a way of bringing Helen back to life through the old city.

Through this formal disposition of a story within a story, *La ciutat de la por* projects a plurality of representations of China with contradictory visions. The most relevant is the paradox between the tropes of China as a reality and China as a fantasy. On the one hand, we find China as an entity which is perfectly attainable. Albert shows how it is actually possible to understand China and Chinese people—despite its remote location and different culture. It is possible even though that knowledge must sometimes be filtered through a European connection like Paris, where Chinese language learning seems to be more systematized (16). Contrary to similar novels of the same period, with pages and chapters describing the time spent on the steamboat to China (Blasco Ibáñez, *La vuelta*; Luís de Oteyza, *De España* and *Diablo*), here the actual journey receives less attention. Getting to China is not difficult at all: we move from Barcelona to Hong Kong in pages (18-20), and at this final stage of the journey, Albert is even able to choose the mode of transportation—a simple raft instead of the sumptuous steamer (20).

There are plenty of details about life in Canton that make it possible for the reader to perceive China as a tangible reality too. Streets, for instance, are described in a very palpable way (22), and we are told about temples in almost photographic relief (46-48). Even exotic practices such as opium smoking are described with attention to very minor details (82). China's accessibility is most notably expressed through an unproblematic perception of communication. There is no place in the novel where we have the impression that Albert has trouble communicating with Chinese people—it is not even clear in which language characters talk to each other (103 or 124, for example). The feeling of linguistic alienation, so characteristically expressed by many travelers since González de Mendoza's accounts in the sixteenth century, is surprisingly absent in *La ciutat de la por*. There are very few mentions of the Chinese written script, only to remark that characters can be "easily translated" (71). Closeness to language relates to a feeling of familiarity with some Chinese people.

On the other hand, *La ciutat de la por* also projects a vision of China as an unreachable fantasy. Besides the obvious distance projected by the fantastic exoticism of Albert's adventures, inaccessibility is mainly produced through a temporal dislocation: juxtaposed to the available China of the present lies the distant China of the past that resembles the one from the books he read as a child. Meeting Lawrence reinforces that distance, as both men are trapped in a China that is not the China they cherish. They remain alienated from the present, though in different ways: while for Albert the real China lies in the fictional dreams of a teenager, for Lawrence the real China is in his own real past and in his love story with Helen. Both are trapped in their own pasts and fantasies. Albert is "disappointed by a lost fantasy" while Lawrence is "disappointed by a lost past reality" (40).

The plot stresses the impossibility of turning the fantasy of Albert's childhood into a reality of the present. In the ensuing confusion, Canton is essentially defined by what it was and not by what it is and China is recognized by what it lacks and not by what it provides: "Who would have thought that he was now in Canton, the most impenetrable city in China? It must be avowed, quite frankly, that



nothing was suggesting that. Only the servants, small and with young faces and oblique, distant eyes, vaguely reminded him of the place where they were" (31).

Lawrence and his Chinese friends recreate that fantasy for Albert. China becomes for a while the impossible land of mysterious pursuit along dark labyrinths, obscure opium dens, secret societies, and secret traps that turn China into a familiar de-familiarized image and Chinese people are stigmatized in a Fu Manchu characterization (74). Reentering his own utopia of the past feels like a hallucination: "A world made of dreams and disturbing delusions, of beautiful hallucinations, of exotic perfumes and fantasies" (82). Being inside his own fantasy is so shocking that Albert even has doubts about what he is experiencing: "His head was spinning, he didn't know whether he was dreaming or he was truly awake. Maybe all these adventures that looked so real were nothing but the effect of the opium he had taken. Was he dreaming or was he awake? Was he experiencing all these mysteries or was it his overexcited brain that was trying to torture him?" (94). In a place of contradiction and uncertainty, the fear in *La ciutat de la por* not only defines Albert's unexpected experiences in Fu Manchu's Canton but also the mutability of a place that seems to remain remote and close, imaginary and real at the same time.

The contradictory ways of imagining China in *La ciutat de la por* epitomize the perception of China in the literary, historical, and political contexts of interwar Europe. For the first time in history, in the 1920s and 1930s Europe saw China and the Chinese in a more nuanced way. This was due to a combination of several historical factors, such as the significant mobility of Europeans to China and Chinese to Europe; the development of new journalistic practices accelerated cross-cultural contacts and also placed China in a coeval position vis-à-vis the West; the impact of the proclamation of the Republic of China (1911-1912) that produced a significant humanization of the Chinese population, and the popularity of Chinese images through popular culture. As a result, in the interwar period the circulation of images of China became wider and overlapping, even contradictory.

That complex mosaic of representations expanded to Spain and Catalonia too. Local conferences given in Barcelona by diplomats such as Juan Mencarini or Eduard Toda, who had served in China at the end of the nineteenth century, had an enormous influence on public opinion and turned China into a topic for intellectual reflection in the first decades of the twentieth century. The same can be said of the sinological works by the Catalan diplomat Sinibaldo de Mas, written originally in French. Essays on China were frequently read and discussed in intellectual circles and spurred the dissemination of knowledge on China making it easily accessible in fields such as literature, history or political thought. The most striking evidence is quantitative: between 1900 and 1930 more than 80 books related to China were published in Spain, including poetry, fiction and fiction (ALTER, *Archivo China-España 1800-1950*, <<http://ace.uoc.edu>>). This included original travelogues and impressions by famous Spanish writers who visited China such as Luís Valera or Vicente Blasco Ibáñez; acknowledged translations of foreign works (about 25 percent of them); and all sorts of writings inspired or based on foreign sources—generally English, French, and German. The books enthusiastically read by Albert during his childhood in *La ciutat de la por*—the titles of which are never mentioned—were probably the sources used by Crespi himself. Some of them actually included photographs, which made it even easier for a writer like Crespi to gather views and information and recreate them. For example, Joan Marín Balmas's *De París a Barcelona passant per Honolulu* (From Paris to Barcelona Through Honolulu) many scenes and passages matching Crespi's representations. In newspapers and magazines, China's presence was even more remarkable. During the early twentieth century, coverage of China did nothing but increase the media interest that had started a few decades earlier with information about Chinese culture, society, and politics. Information appearing regularly in Spanish illustrated magazines using sources that had already been published in England or France (Ning, *De la China legendaria*) became even more widespread. The ample representation and media focus fostered the perception of shared political projects between China and Catalonia (d'Ors, *La Veu*).

While European sources reconfigured China into a more accessible reality, there was more involved than just the import of data or certain aesthetics. At the end of *La ciutat de la por*, Albert and Lawrence end up leaving Canton due to the tension related to the incidents in Bias Bay, a place where Chinese pirates used to hijack foreign ships. This was the source of important diplomatic conflicts, until the British legation decided to send their army. These incidents were closely followed in the Catalan press—despite the fact that there were no Spanish vessels or citizens affected. On March 30, 1927, for instance, *La Vanguardia's* International page devoted three out of four columns to China and this particular subject. Again, sources were not direct: all the information came from press agencies which were either foreign (Reuter, United Press, Havas) or based on foreign press releases (Fabra based on Havas). A colonial view was therefore transferred into a national context outside colonial dynamics.

The translations or "interpretations" of Chinese poetry penned by important figures such as Marià Manent in *L'aire d'aurat* (The Golden Air) in 1928 or Josep Carner in *Lluna i llanterna* (Moon and Lantern) in 1935 are another example of these implications. They used English and French versions such as Arthur Waley's and George Soulié de Morant's, which were mentioned in the prefaces with almost as much reverence as the original sources. The indirectness was explicitly recognized—and it was something that actually legitimized their work, following the hands of English masters. In a context of building a literary and cultural modernity, China was a springboard to Europe (Ollé, "El veïnat xinès" 167-86). It is not a surprising, then, that Albert comes under Lawrence's guidance in *La ciutat de la por*: to access China through European go-betweens was also a way of projecting Catalonia's anxieties towards—and submission to—European modernity and the modern world.

At the same time, however, China remained an unreachable fantasy in the Catalan culture and society of the 1920s and 1930s. Chinese images and aesthetics became part of popular culture, which projected a more unreal image of the Chinese people. Films like *Fuhuo de meigui* (1927, premiered in Spain in 1929 as *La rosa que muere*) and *Xixiang ji* (1927, premiered in Spain in 1929 as *La rosa de Pu-Chui*) projected a more remote and exoticized vision of China. At the same time, Puccini's exoticized representations in *Madama Butterfly* (1903) became even more familiar across Catalan society along with many Chinese acrobats who worked in circuses before the foundation of the famous Teatro Circo de Manolita Chen in the 1940s. These popular images of the exotic even transcultured into kitsch with figures such as Vicente Hong, a Chinese toreador who fascinated audiences across Spain in 1930, or Chinese giant figures (hollow statues made of wood about 3-4 meters tall) included in Catalan folklore troupes.  $\epsilon\Omega\approx\zeta\sqrt{\sqrt{\zeta}\approx\Omega\sim\mu\leq\dots\neg^{\circ}\Delta'\odot f\partial\beta\tilde{\alpha}\Sigma'\oplus\ddagger''^{\wedge}\partial\eta''$

The most influential agent in the consolidation of China as an exotic, unreachable place was the genre of adventure fiction. Verne's *The Tribulations of a Chinaman in China* was instrumental in the success of this genre in Spain and Catalonia and in the consequences it had for the representation of China. Its influence over the extremely popular novel *Aventures den Bolavà en el país dels xinos* (Bolavà's Adventures in the Country of the Chinese) by Josep Maria Folch i Torres (1912) cannot be overstated. Folch i Torres was at the time the most-widely read author in Catalan popular fiction. In *Bolavà al país dels xinos* he recreates Verne's novel in elements such as the pursuits or the combination of technology with adventure. *Bolavà al país dels xinos* also reconfigures Verne's fascination for the mysterious exoticism of China by adding a comical tone. Such transculturation stressed the unreal, fantastic vision of China turning, for instance, the metaphor of the yellow peril into a caricature (68).

The similarities between *The Tribulations of a Chinaman in China* and *La ciutat de la por* illustrate the importation of a certain frame of representation. Both works share the starting point, as we meet the main character in the depths of his existential crisis. And they also share the subsequent plot development, the truth about which we will only find out later on: a (secret) intervention of a wise friend will enable the main character to regain the joy of life through a series of adventures that will become the actual leitmotiv of the novel. Yet Crespi adapted this theme to the Catalan context: it is a young Catalan man who travels to China in order to experience in reality what he had read about in fiction. The cross-cultural journey highlights the social condition of a young bourgeois Catalan man who seeks in China what he has lost in his becoming an adult and having to assume the responsibilities at his father's factory. Compared to *The Tribulations of a Chinaman in China*, then, *La ciutat de la por* stresses even more the inaccessibility of a China that has become unreachable in a contemporary world that makes traveling easier.

What was the result of the coexistence of an accessible and an unreachable China in Catalan society? In my view, this created an ambivalence that turned China into a symbol devoid of actual meaning, as it had been the case in previous decades (Prado-Fonts, "China como patriótico desahogo"). Two literary experiments actually delved into that ambiguity. In *Pekin* (Beijing), a comic monologue written by the multitalented intellectual Apel·les Mestres in 1901, China is nothing but an empty referent. The narrator makes repeated references to China but nothing is really said about it. China only acquires meaning for its "difference", not for what it really is—which becomes irrelevant. In *L'home que es va perdre* (The Man who got Lost), an experimental first novel by Francesc Trabal published in 1929, several chapters are set in China, but the predetermined images of China as a foreign, exotic, different land get turned upside down. Echoing the European avant-garde claims for using art to break with certainties, *L'home que es va perdre* makes use of China to break with fixed meanings: contrary to all the works that wanted to show a "real" China through clichés and stereotypes, Trabal depicts a fictional China through a realistic portrait.

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of *La ciutat de la por* is the capacity to confront the paradoxical ambivalence of China. Crespi's novel transcends it, and in a remarkable twist, quite unusual in a novel of its genre, it actually provides an explanation for the coexistence of an accessible and an un-

reachable China. Given the impossibility of recuperating the real past for himself, Lawrence tries to recuperate the fantastic past for his friend. But, while he recreates an adventure "that fulfilled your teenage fantasies in a practical way: an adventure full of mystery, opium dens, Chinese cruelty" (135), the result ends up being just a Pyrrhic victory: a temporary illusion, limited in time and scope. Fantasy nowadays belongs to the past. The end of the novel makes us aware of that by once again throwing us back to the real China of the present. We are suddenly told about the controversy in Bias Bay, where piracy has caused the intervention of English/foreign armies, and has created a social upheaval, conflicts, and xenophobia. And the fear of the Boxer upheaval reappears as a danger for the future (129). The sudden localization of past, present and future time lays the ground for an explanation: it has been Western modernity that has caused the loss of the authentic China that has now been left behind on the timeline of historical development.

Lawrence is extremely critical: the West has broken the purity of China and "the white man, after getting into the Celestial Empire, has destroyed the exoticism of this land of dreams" (170). His reflection goes beyond the specific frame of China, as exoticism has disappeared everywhere and progress and brutality have evolved hand in hand all around the world (170-73). The scale of the problem is then global: "Civilization, with its formidable impetus, does not respect anything. As it makes its way, lands of dreams and fantasy disappear. ... The whole world has followed and will follow this unchanging path of ambition. The old legendary countries—Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, India, Japan—all the countries that used their multiple charms to attract the attention of all the romantics and those who fantasized" (132).

Underlying Lawrence's long, melancholic and critical approach lie two aspects that hint at the actual politics of cross-cultural representation and the subordination of agency. First, the critique of Western civilization and colonial expansion is articulated through the voice of an Englishman. Lawrence was the one who really knew Canton and the one who orchestrated the plot, and he is also the one who offers that critical reflection. Having both the factual knowledge and the conceptual vision, Lawrence is the demiurge who monopolizes the narrative. His position in the formal structure of the novel is in striking contrast with the Chinese characters—passive and without any voice—and with Albert, who is also a piece moving at Lawrence's rhythm. Just as Western modernity has colonized China, Lawrence's narration colonizes the explanation of China's predicament derived from it. Second, at this point in the novel we realize that the narrator has been inconsistent. *La ciutat de la por* opened with a *captatio* announcing that all of the following adventures actually took place. It was a "true story" (15) that the reader assumed would be told by an omniscient narrator. But it turned out to be just a character voice that did not really know the development of the plot. While this can easily be attributed to Crespi's inexperience as a young writer, it nevertheless leaves the narration under Lawrence's command.

Albert's voiceless position and the inconsistencies of the narrative voice symbolize the lack of Catalan agency in conceiving, narrating, and analyzing China at the time. Just as had been the case with the tropes of reachable reality and unattainable fantasy, these critical reflections on modernity and their formal implications should be understood through the intervention of foreign discourses upon the Catalan context. During the second half of the 1920s, this kind of reflection on the consequences of progress and modernity is easily traceable to the impact of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* on Spanish and Catalan society (Ortega y Gasset, "Prólogo"; de Maeztu, "Decadencia"; Lemke Duque, "La Biblioteca") especially due to the fact they inserted Spain and/or Catalonia into a transnational discourse at a European level while retaining a certain national specificity (Lemke Duque, "El concepto" 562; Gaziol, "Les viles espirituals").

Lawrence's reflection that closes *La ciutat de la por* emerges from Spengler's aura. While topics such as the gap between the imagined China and the real China were not uncommon in other works on China at the time, the depth of Lawrence's Spenglerian reflection is very remarkable—especially in a work aimed at a wide readership. Works such as *El Diablo Blanco* (The White Devil) and *La ciutat de la por* combined entertainment with critical reflections on modernity, progress, and the human condition. They added a "radical skepticism about the capacity to improve the human condition and the so-called advances in this progress," which were typical of the anxieties at the end of the interwar period (Pérez Bowie, "Presentación" 21).

In *La ciutat de la por* China is now a reachable reality that has not ceased to be an unreachable fantasy of a sublime world. Crespi's novel reflects on how to keep that fantasy real today and attempts to reconcile these two visions through fiction—both in Lawrence's scheme and on its very own pages: "You were looking for a China that has disappeared, that only *currently* exists among the pages of old books by travelers and novelists who are not very scrupulous about still using that worn out cliché of the yellow mystery" (173, italics mine). But the strategy fails, Albert and Lawrence abandon China, and we are left with a critique of the dark side of progress and Western civilization. The inclu-



sion of such a critical view on modernity is remarkable in a work of popular literature, but existence of that idealized China of the past is never questioned in the first place. Being a pulp novel of its time, *La ciutat de la por* assumes with gusto its own nature of a not very scrupulous novel that also uses the worn-out cliché of the yellow mystery. This piece of Catalan fiction encapsulates the varied and contradictory representations of China in European society during the 1920s and 1930s. In this article we have seen how the dual China of *La ciutat de la por* exemplifies the multiple views on China from Catalonia and how they were largely determined by European discourses. This example reveals how impossible it was to imagine China in Catalonia without the mediation of English, French, or German sources. Acting as mediators, they not only provided factual knowledge about China, but also a way to approach it, a voice to narrate, and a frame to criticize Western civilization.

This brings us back to the concept of translingual practice and to the metaphor of host language and guest language. Liu proposed this terminology to emphasize the host context as a place for "adaptation, translation, introduction, and domestication of words, categories, discourses, and modes of representations" (*Translingual* 26-27). Arriving from a guest origin they were inserted into the "transmission, manipulation, deployment, and domination within the power structure of the host language" (*Translingual* 26-27). In Liu's analysis, the host language is late-Qing and Republican China, while the guest language is the West—two cultural contexts that, in spite of Liu's emphasis on adaptation or appropriation, stand in a colonial relationship to each other. *La ciutat de la por* shows how, in the domain of East-West studies, we need to problematize the roles of host and guest in contexts beyond direct colonial interaction. A close examination of the representations of China in Catalonia and Spain uncover a series of intermediaries between host and guest, who filter and channel certain discourses on the Chinese guest that will be later inserted in the local context of the Catalan host. Representing China from peripheral European places was dependent on these agents whose legitimacy stemmed from their colonial past and whose influence was now extended beyond their colonial geographical domains. The representations of China in *La ciutat de la por* complicate the idea of national, linguistic borders in cross-cultural interaction and tell us that the world is, in fact, a vast contact zone.

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